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# We do, too, have think tanks

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JOAN BARRON | Posted: Sunday, January 10, 2010 12:00 am | 1 Comment



Barron

CHEYENNE -- What makes an organization a think tank?

According to the formal definition, it is any group that conducts research, analyzes public issues and adopts an advocacy position.

A study conducted early in 2009 by Dr. James McGann, of the University of Pennsylvania Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, said Wyoming has no think tanks.

McGann attributed the lack to Wyoming's small population, according to a report on the Internet.

We beg to differ.

Dan Neal, director of the Equality State Policy Center, says he would argue that his organization and the Wyoming Heritage Foundation qualify as think tanks.

There is a new third think tank at work in the state.

Wyoming Liberty Group, a conservative think tank, was established two years ago but has only been in operation for one year.

The group's lobbyists testified before a couple of legislative committees earlier but otherwise it's been pretty low profile up to now.

The group is working with legislators this year on language in a bill that would specify health care is a state, not a federal, issue.

It may or may not come together this year.

The nonprofit conservative think tank was founded two years ago by philanthropist Susan Gore of Cheyenne of the Gore-Tex family.

The organization has an office in Cheyenne and three, full-time staff people.

The group also has a small lobbyist group, that includes Charles Ware, formerly with the Wyoming Contractors' Association, now under contract to the new organization as a legislative consultant and strategist.

The Wyoming Liberty Group's (WLG) Web site makes clear where the organization stands on the national health care reform bill. It's a no.

The Web page also has articles critical of the Wyoming Business Council as a recipient of "corporate welfare" and of growth of government in general.



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The WLG is affiliated with the national organization, the State Policy Network (SPN). The Cato Institution is another think tank under the SPN's national umbrella.

The Cato Institute, incidentally, gave Gov. Dave Freudenthal a "D" grade in 2008, for his spending policies.

The WLG "is a traditional public policy think tank and will produce papers on various issues," Ware said last week of the WLG.

The group is interested in core constitutional issues, free speech and will focus mostly on state rather than federal issues.

"We are looking at health care issues and the health care budget," Ware added. "We're looking at taxation issues, at trends over the past 10 years and how taxes have affected economic growth. We've been tracking the impact and results of the stimulus money that is going to Wyoming."

According to the Equality State Policy Center Web site, that group is a "progressive think tank" that uses research, public education and advocacy to help maintain accountability in state government and increase citizen participation and influence.

The Wyoming Heritage Foundation/Wyoming Business Alliance was established in 1979 to promote Wyoming's traditional businesses and industries.

The group continues to advocate on behalf of the business community.

"To advance this mission, it facilitates leadership development, promotes education and responsible debate, convenes public forums, researches viable alternatives, and recommends policy actions," according to the organization's Web site.

By the traditional definition, its mission makes the Wyoming Heritage Foundation/Wyoming Business Alliance a think tank, too.

Back to McGann, meanwhile, who wrote an interesting report despite his snub of Wyoming's think tanks.

The McGann report said there are 1,777 think tanks in the United States, including 374 based in Washington, D.C.

Think tanks started to show up in the 1960s and 1970s and exploded in the 1980s.

Today, they are considered the most comprehensive source of information globally for policy makers, the report said.

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